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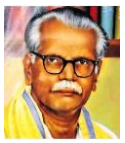

On the completion of the Centenary year of Self-respect movement *"Kuralneri e-zines"* Editorial board delightfully publishes this special issue on Self-respect movement. Our warm regards to the ***aasiriyar ayya*** for his tireless service and greetings to those sincere volunteers extending their tireless service to propagate the lofty maxim.

Thiruvalluvar and Self-respect

Thiruvalluvar, through the Thirukkural (especially in the sections on Virtue and Wealth), reiterates the duty of every person to maintain self-esteem and self-respect(மானம் – maanam) as well as self-discipline (ஒழுக்கம் - ozhukkam or honour) by setting them as values more crucial than life, wealth, or power.

He establishes this duty through a combination of negative injunctions (what not to do) and positive affirmations (what to strive for).

1. Honour as the Core of Life (Maanam)

The Kural explicitly equates honour and self-respect with the very essence of human existence, making their maintenance a person's highest duty.

| மயிர்நீப்பின் வாழாக் கவரிமா அன்னார் உயிர்நீப்பர் மானம் வரின் (969)

Like the wild Yak that dies, if hair removed,

Are they who, striped of honor, quit life unapproved.

Thiruvalluvar advises against actions that compromise self-respect, framing them as a moral failing that cancels out any material gain.

* Avoid Begging and Servitude (107-இரவச்சம்): The duty to maintain self-respect demands absolute avoidance of begging or servitude to others, even in poverty.

"இற்பிறந்தார் கண்ணேயும் இன்மை இளிவந்த,
சொற்பிறக்கும் சோர்வு வரும்" (1044):

Even among the noble, poverty will birth,
Words of disgrace, forgotten in their worth.

3. Self-Discipline and Moral Purity (ஒழுக்கம் - Ozhukkam)

In a broader sense, maintaining self-respect is a continuous, active duty achieved through self-discipline and moral conduct, or ozhukkam.

The Guarding of Character: Self-respect is not merely an internal feeling but is reflected in one's consistent behavior. Maintaining it requires moral vigilance.

"ஒழுக்கம் விழுப்பந் தரலான் ஒழுக்கம், உயிரினும் ஓம்பப் படும்" (131):

Decorum gives especial excellence and worth;
Guard it more than life, cherished by all on earth.

This couplet encapsulates the entire duty: honour is a choice and a sustained act of guarding one’s moral conduct.

In summary, Thiruvalluvar places self-esteem and honour (maanam) at the apex of human virtues, declaring them to be the non-negotiable standards of a worthy life. The duty is to live in such a way that one's conduct (ozhukkam) never causes their honour to be questioned, even if it means sacrificing life or the chance for wealth.

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The metamorphosis of Self-Respect movement into the Dravidian model of Governance

-Maraimalai Ilakkuvanar

(The essay is designed in a format to answer often repeated questions, for readability)

What is the Self-Respect movement?

The Self-Respect Movement (also known as Thanmathippu Iyakkam and Suya mariyathai Iyakkam in Tamil) was a dynamic social movement aimed at social reform and establishing an egalitarian society in South India, particularly the Madras Presidency (modern-day Tamil Nadu).

It sought to extinguish the contemporary Hindu social order, which was based on the rigid caste system, and create a new, rational society free from caste, religion, and the notion of divine rule.

The core of the movement was to:

* Eradicate Caste and Untouchability: Challenge Brahminical dominance and the caste hierarchy.
* Promote Rationalism: Encourage logical thinking and critical inquiry over blind faith, superstition, and religious rituals.
* Advocate for Social and Gender Equality: Fight for equal rights for women (including property rights, divorce, and widow remarriage) and the lower castes.
* Pioneer Self-Respect Marriages: Ceremonies conducted without a Brahmin priest or religious rituals, later legally recognized in Tamil Nadu.

Founder and Time of Foundation

The Self-Respect Movement was founded by:

* Founder: E.V. Ramasamy, popularly known as Periyar (meaning 'respected one' or 'elder').

* A century ago in 1925 (in the Madras Presidency, India) Periyar launched the movement after leaving the Indian National Congress, disillusioned with the organization's tolerance of caste-based discrimination and its failure to prioritize social reform alongside political freedom (Swaraj). The movement laid the ideological foundation for the later Dravidian movement, which profoundly shaped the politics and social landscape of Tamil Nadu.

Was it a pro-British movement?

The Self-Respect Movement, led by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, was not a pro-British movement in the conventional sense of supporting British imperialism, but it was generally non-aligned or critical of the mainstream Indian nationalist movement (led by the Congress).

Here's a breakdown of its stance:

* Prioritization of Social Reform: Periyar's primary goal was social and cultural emancipation—to end the oppressive caste system, Brahminical dominance, and religious superstitions. He famously argued that "political freedom (Swaraj) would not be fruitful without individual self-respect." For him, fighting internal social injustice was more urgent and fundamental than fighting for national political independence.

* Critique of Congress Nationalism: Periyar left the Indian National Congress in 1925 precisely because he felt that the Congress party was dominated by upper-caste leaders who were more interested in replacing British rule with their own power structure (which he feared would perpetuate the caste system) than in genuinely abolishing social inequality. He often accused nationalist leaders like Gandhi of upholding religious orthodoxy and caste practices.

* Strategic Engagement with the British: The Self-Respect Movement, and its precursor, the Justice Party, often strategically engaged with the British colonial administration to secure benefits for non-Brahmins, such as:

* Communal Representation: They successfully lobbied the British government to pass orders (like the G.O. No. 1129 in 1928) ensuring reservations and representation for non-Brahmins in government jobs and education.

* This cooperation was a pragmatic move to use the colonial government's power to undermine the traditional social and political dominance of the Brahmins in the Madras Presidency.

In summary, the movement's relationship with the British was one of critical distance from the independence movement and pragmatic engagement with the colonial government to achieve its core social justice goals for non-Brahmins. Periyar was primarily an anti-caste, anti-religion, and rationalist reformer, and he viewed the social freedom of the individual as a higher priority than national political freedom.

Who were the other leaders next to Periyar? What were their contributions?

The Self-Respect Movement, while founded and primarily driven by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, featured several other dedicated leaders and activists whose contributions were crucial to its success and spread.

The prominent leaders, particularly women activists, and their key contributions were:

C.N. Annadurai (later 'Anna') | Initially a close follower of Periyar and a powerful orator. He became the face of the movement's political evolution. He later split to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in 1949, carrying the core rationalist and self-respect ideology into the mainstream political arena. |

W.P.A. Soundara Pandian | A non-Brahmin leader who played a significant role in the Justice Party (the political precursor to the movement) and presided over the First Provincial Self-Respect Conference held in Chengalpattu in 1929. This conference was a landmark event that articulated the movement's principles. |

Annai Meenambal | A prominent woman leader and social activist. She was the one who bestowed the title 'Periyar' (meaning 'great one' or 'respected elder') on E.V. Ramasamy in 1938 at a women's conference. She played a key role in advocating for Dalit women's rights within the movement. |

Veeramal | Another crucial woman activist who actively campaigned for women's rights, challenged caste oppression, and consistently pushed Periyar to focus on the issues facing women and marginalized communities. |

Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar | A dedicated social reformer who devoted her life to opposing patriarchal social customs like the Devadasi system and promoting inter-caste marriages. She was also jailed during the anti-Hindi protests of 1938. The Tamil Nadu government later named a social welfare scheme for marriage assistance after her. |

Nagammai (Periyar's first wife) | A social reformer and activist who led the Anti-Arrack (liquor) movements and served as the editor of 'Kudi Arasu' (The Republic), the movement's official Tamil weekly journal, which was the primary propaganda tool for spreading Periyar's radical ideas. |

Kuthoosi Gurusamy & Kunjidham | Both were prominent writers and activists in the movement. Their marriage on December 8, 1929, was conducted by Periyar and is historically noted as the first self-respect marriage entirely devoid of Hindu religious ceremony, serving as a powerful example of the movement's ideals. |

What were the counter-actions from the congress movement and national leaders on the Self-Respect Movement?

The counter-actions by the Congress movement and national leaders against the Self-Respect Movement (SRM) were primarily focused on political marginalization, opposition to its radical social agenda, and efforts to maintain the centrality of the political independence struggle.

The conflict stemmed from the SRM's core belief that political freedom (Swaraj) without social equality was meaningless, which directly challenged the Congress's singular focus on overthrowing British rule.

1. Ideological Conflict and Marginalization

The most significant counter-action was the ideological opposition led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress establishment, particularly the conservative sections in Madras Presidency:

* Prioritizing Political Swaraj: Congress leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi, stressed that all internal social issues must take a backseat to the primary goal of achieving national political independence. This indirectly marginalized the SRM's core message of social revolution first.

* Defense of Religion/Orthodoxy: Periyar's radical critique was anti-caste, anti-religion, and anti-God, directly attacking the Hindu social order. This put him at odds with the religious orientation of many Congress leaders, including Gandhi, who were conservative in their social outlook and defended aspects of Hindu tradition (even while fighting untouchability).

* Caste Discrimination within Congress: Periyar's initial break from Congress in 1925 was a reaction to the party's unwillingness to address caste-based discrimination in institutions it supported (like the Cheranmadevi Gurukulam) and its refusal to implement communal representation for non-Brahmins. Congress leaders resisted these demands, effectively pushing Periyar out.

2. Direct Political Counter-Action (Anti-Hindi Agitations)

The most direct and significant counter-action came from the Congress administration in the Madras Presidency:

Compulsory Hindi Imposition (1937): Under the first Congress government, Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), a close confidant of Gandhi, made the teaching of Hindi compulsory in schools.

SRM's Response: Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement saw this as an attempt at "Aryan" or North Indian cultural imposition over the Dravidian South. This Congress policy triggered the massive Anti-Hindi Agitations of 1937-39, a fierce counter-movement led by Periyar and his allies.

The Outcome: The Congress government responded with arrests and crackdowns, but the widespread public resistance, fueled by the SRM's ideology, eventually forced the Congress government to withdraw the measure and later contributed to the complete electoral downfall of the Congress party in Tamil Nadu after 1967.

3. Personal Scrutiny and Ridicule

Nationalist leaders and the pro-Congress press often responded to Periyar's radicalism with attempts to discredit him:

Attacks on Periyar’s methods: Periyar's highly provocative, theatrical, and symbolic actions—such as tearing up pictures of Hindu deities or his fiery rhetoric—were frequently denounced by Congress leaders and the Brahmin-dominated press as "anti-national," "separatist," or "extremist," aimed at distracting from the main freedom struggle.

Allegations of Pro-British Sentiments: The Congress leadership, deeply entrenched in the anti-British movement, accused Periyar of being a "tool of the British" or a "separatist" because he publicly focused on internal social reform and used the Justice Party's political platform (which was not actively anti-British) to secure communal representation. This was a form of political branding to isolate him from the national movement.

What was the response from the communist movement?

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Was Periyar a leftist?

Yes, Periyar's anti-Brahmin movement and his dramatic exit from the party had a profound and lasting impact on the Congress leadership in the Madras Presidency, forcing the party to eventually adopt non-Brahmin interests.

The influence was not immediate or uniform, but it was significant:

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* Rejection by Congress: These resolutions were consistently defeated or refused to be tabled by the majority of the Congress leadership, which was seen to be dominated by Brahmins (as exemplified by the Kanchipuram Conference in 1925). The argument was often that such resolutions would "exacerbate ill-feeling" or undermine "national unity."
* The Gurukulam Incident: An incident where a school (Gurukulam) run by a Congress leader discriminated against non-Brahmin students by serving them food in separate areas further cemented Periyar's view that the Congress was not serious about social equality.

Periyar's resignation in 1925 and the subsequent launch of the Self-Respect Movement (SRM) was the direct, explosive result of the Congress's failure to address anti-Brahmin sentiment. This established the SRM as a political and social counter-force.

2. The Rise of Non-Brahmin Congress Leaders

Periyar's sustained agitation from outside the Congress eventually paved the way for a different kind of leader to emerge from within the party, one who could no longer ignore the non-Brahmin social base:

K. Kamaraj: The most prominent example is K. Kamaraj, a non-Brahmin leader who rose through the Congress ranks. Periyar recognized Kamaraj as a champion of non-Brahmin interests and, despite his decades-long opposition to the Congress party, Periyar unconditionally supported Kamaraj's bid to head the Madras government in 1954. Periyar campaigned for Kamaraj-led Congress governments in subsequent elections (until 1967), explicitly on the grounds that Kamaraj represented non-Brahmin interests, effectively separating Kamaraj's regional Congress from the "all-India" Congress that Periyar still distrusted.

Policy Shift: The pressure exerted by the SRM and the Justice Party (its political predecessor) ultimately forced all political players in the region, including the Congress, to acknowledge and implement policies of social justice, especially reservations, to remain electorally viable.

3. Long-Term Impact on Caste Policy

While the national Congress under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru often viewed caste politics skeptically (preferring economic class), the political reality created by Periyar forced the South to prioritize caste. Periyar's pressure, particularly his mobilization of non-Brahmin sentiment, was a significant factor in the post-independence constitutional battles over reservation, contributing to the eventual First Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1951 which enabled the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes.

What were the responses in other states particularly North India?

The Self-Respect Movement (SRM) was primarily a regional revolution, and while its ideological tenets resonated widely, it did not gain the same organized mass following in North India as it did in Tamil Nadu and some neighboring South Indian states.

Here is a breakdown of the response in other states, particularly North India:

North India: Ideological Overlap, Limited Organization

In North India, the SRM did not translate into a separate, massive organizational force, but its core ideas found strong resonance within existing anti-caste and social justice movements.

1. Resonance with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Movement

The most significant ideological connection was with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's anti-caste movement in Western and North India. Both leaders were doughty warriors against the caste system and Brahminical dominance:

* Shared Objectives: Both Periyar and Ambedkar championed rationalism, self-respect, and the annihilation of caste as the foundational requirements for an egalitarian society.
* Literary Exchange: Periyar translated and published Ambedkar's seminal work, "Annihilation of Caste," in his magazine Kudi Arasu, showing a clear commitment to sharing anti-caste thought across linguistic boundaries.
* Periyar's True Ramayan: Periyar's radical critique of Hindu epics, especially his version of the Ramayana (titled Rāmāyaṇam: A True Reading), was translated into Hindi by Periyar Lalai Singh Yadav (later Periyar Lalai Baudh) in the 1960s. This book caused a massive uproar and legal battles among fundamentalist groups, demonstrating that Periyar's radical challenge to religious authority was indeed being propagated in the Hindi belt.

2. Lack of a Separate Mass Movement

Despite the ideological synergy, several factors prevented the SRM from establishing a large, independent organizational presence in the North:

Regional Focus: The SRM's political mobilization was tightly linked to Dravidian identity (anti-Hindi agitation, Dravida Nadu demands) and the specific political and social history of the Madras Presidency, which did not directly translate to the cultural context of North India.

Pre-existing Movements: North India already had its own constellation of social reform and anti-caste movements, such as the Arya Samaj, the Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar tradition in Maharashtra, and various Dalit assertion movements, which served as the primary vehicles for challenging the social order.

Brahmin Demographics: Some scholars suggest that the comparatively higher population of Brahmins and other dominant castes in North India made open revolt against the Hindu social order significantly more challenging than in the Deccan region.

Other South Indian States: Direct Influence

In the regions adjacent to Tamil Nadu, particularly the old Madras Presidency, the influence of the SRM was more direct:

Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Region): The SRM's influence was significant, particularly among non-Brahmin castes. Leaders like Gora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao), an important figure in the atheist and rationalist movement in Andhra Pradesh, were directly inspired by the Self-Respect ideology. The movement helped accelerate caste-based political mobilization in the region.

Kerala: Periyar's involvement in the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–25), a struggle for the rights of Dalits to use a public road near a temple in Travancore, established his anti-caste credentials early on, making him a recognized figure in Kerala's reform politics.

Overseas Tamil Diaspora: The movement was also highly influential in countries with large Tamil populations, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Singapore, where it played a role in identity formation and social reform.

Were there any impacts on congress leaders by this movement?

The simple answer is Yes, Periyar was a leftist, but his brand of leftism was fundamentally a "social-first" intersectional movement that prioritized caste eradication over classic class struggle.

His ideology aligns strongly with leftist principles on social and economic matters, but it was unique in its prioritization:

1. Strong Alignment with Socialist/Marxist Economic Ideals

Following his 1931-32 tour of the Soviet Union and Europe, Periyar's ideology incorporated key socialist and communist principles, which he referred to using the Tamil neologism "Samadharmam" (equal order).

* Anti-Capitalist Stance: He was fiercely critical of unfettered capitalism and private property, seeing them as sources of inequality and oppression.
* "Erode Programme": This 1934 manifesto of the Self-Respect Movement, heavily influenced by communist leaders like Singaravelu Chettiar, demanded:
  * Public ownership of all agricultural land, forests, waterbodies, banks, and railways.
  * Complete independence from capitalist governments.
  * Abolition of private property rights that created inequality.
* Welfare State: He advocated for a welfare state where the government would take responsibility for citizens' well-being from birth to old age, negating the need for people to rely on children (or religion) for security.

2. The Unique "Caste-First" Leftism

Where Periyar diverged from the classical Communist Party of India (CPI) of his time was his unwavering insistence that the social hierarchy (caste) was the primary form of oppression in India, even more fundamental than economic class.

* Caste as Capital: Periyar famously criticized "capitalists by birth"—meaning the upper castes (Brahmins) who enjoyed privileges and the benefits of labor simply due to their social standing, without any economic investment. He called this "birth

capital," arguing that religious and caste structures were essential tools for maintaining this social and economic dominance.

* Critique of Indian Communists: He accused the Indian Communist movement (which was often led by upper castes) of focusing only on economic class, arguing that "Talking Communism, without eradicating caste, is like discussing higher education without the rudiments of learning." He believed that without abolishing caste, the benefits of communism would simply be co-opted by the existing socially privileged classes.

3. Radical Social Leftism (Feminism and Rationalism)

Periyar's views on gender and religion were far more radical than most contemporary left movements:

* Radical Feminism: He was a foundational figure in radical Indian feminism, advocating for women's right to property, divorce, birth control, and even sexual freedom, viewing the family and marriage as patriarchal institutions that required liberation.

* Atheism/Rationalism: His anti-religious stance—rejecting God, rituals, and superstition—was a radical leftist approach to social conditioning, viewing religion as the ideological tool used by the ruling class (Brahminism) to legitimize social inequality.

In summary, Periyar was undoubtedly a radical leftist whose ideology was a powerful fusion of socialism, anti-caste revolution, and rationalist feminism. His political project was the most radical left-wing movement in South India, directly laying the groundwork for the Dravidian political parties that continue to dominate Tamil Nadu.

At present what are its impacts on Mayavathi,Lalu and other northern leaders?

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Is there a scope for it in future?

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Policy Shift: The pressure exerted by the SRM and the Justice Party (its political predecessor) ultimately forced all political players in the region, including the Congress, to acknowledge and implement policies of social justice, especially reservations, to remain electorally viable.

3. Long-Term Impact on Caste Policy

While the national Congress under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru often viewed caste politics skeptically (preferring economic class), the political reality created by Periyar forced the South to prioritize caste. Periyar's pressure, particularly his mobilization of non-Brahmin sentiment, was a significant factor in the post-independence constitutional battles over reservation, contributing to the eventual First Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1951 which enabled the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes.

The influence of Periyar's ideas on social justice and Congress's internal politics is detailed in this video: Periyar EV Ramasamy's anti-Brahmin movement and Congress leaders.

How did it metamorphose as the Dravidian movement?

The transition of Periyar’s ideology into the full-fledged Dravidian Movement was a multi-stage metamorphosis that fundamentally redefined the basis of identity politics in South India. It evolved from an elitist demand for jobs to a mass-based movement for cultural and social revolution.

The metamorphosis occurred in three key stages:

1. The Justice Party (1916): Elite Anti-Brahminism

The earliest precursor was the South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF), popularly known as the Justice Party, founded in 1916.

* Basis: The movement was initially a reaction by wealthy, educated, non-Brahmin elites (like landlords, merchants, and professionals) who felt monopolized out of

government jobs and educational opportunities by the minority Tamil Brahmins during the British colonial administration.

* Goal: The primary goal was political representation and share in power for the non-Brahmin castes, achieved through administrative measures like the Communal Government Order (G.O.) for reservation in 1921.

* Limitation: It was largely an elitist, urban movement that did not penetrate the masses or challenge the deep-seated cultural and religious roots of the caste system.

2. Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement (1925): Ideological Radicalization

Periyar's entry and the founding of the Self-Respect Movement (Suyamariyathai\ Iyakkam) in 1925 shifted the movement from a political party for elites to a radical social and cultural movement for the masses.

* Shift in Focus: Periyar famously declared that "political freedom is useless without individual self-respect." He argued that winning a few government jobs was superficial; the real fight had to be against the cultural and religious framework (Brahminism/Hinduism) that assigned low status to the non-Brahmin masses.

* Core Ideals: The movement injected Rationalism, Atheism, Women's Rights, and a direct attack on superstitions and religious rituals (e.g., Self-Respect Marriages) into the non-Brahmin agenda.

* From Caste to Culture: Periyar broadened the anti-Brahmin critique into a larger theory: he argued that the social hierarchy was a result of the Aryan (North Indian, Sanskritic) conquest and cultural imposition on the indigenous Dravidian (South Indian) people. This provided a compelling, unifying cultural identity for all non-Brahmins.

3. The Birth of the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) (1944): Consolidation

The final metamorphosis occurred when Periyar took over the Justice Party, revived it, and formally renamed it the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) in 1944 at the Salem Conference.

* Synthesis: This act officially fused the political legacy of the Justice Party with the radical cultural and social ideology of the Self-Respect Movement. The non-Brahmin political demand was now articulated under a unified Dravidian cultural identity.

* The Dravida Nation: The DK championed the demand for a separate, sovereign state called Dravida Nadu (Land of the Dravidians) in opposition to what Periyar viewed as North Indian/Aryan dominance inherent in Indian nationalism and the Congress party.

* Ideological Vanguard: Periyar decreed that the DK would not participate in electoral politics but would serve as the ideological pressure group to hold any governing party accountable to its principles of social justice.

This final stage set the stage for the next and most consequential development: the 1949 split led by C.N. Annadurai, who formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which took the Dravidian ideology into electoral politics and eventually governed Tamil Nadu.

At present what are its impacts on Myavathi, Lalu and other North Indian leaders?

The current impact of Periyar's ideology on North Indian leaders like Mayawati (Bahujan Samaj Party - BSP) and Lalu Prasad Yadav (Rashtriya Janata Dal - RJD) is primarily indirect and ideological, rather than organizational.

While they may not explicitly reference Periyar as frequently as South Indian leaders, their core political project is rooted in the same principles Periyar pioneered: social justice, self-respect, anti-casteism, and mobilization of the oppressed majority (Bahujan/OBCs).

1. Mayawati and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

Mayawati and the BSP, founded by Kanshi Ram, operate on a Bahujan (majority) platform that shares a deep ideological lineage with Periyar's movement:

Periyar's Principle (Dravidian Movement) & Reflection in Mayawati's Politics (BSP)

Self-Respect (Swa-Abhiman) : The central focus on restoring dignity (Bahujan Samman) to Dalits and other oppressed castes, challenging the traditional hierarchy by asserting political power.

Critique of Brahminical Hegemony : The BSP's politics, at its foundation, challenges the dominance of the upper castes in political, social, and administrative institutions, mirroring Periyar's anti-Brahminism. |

Unity of the Oppressed :Periyar urged non-Brahmins (Sudras and Dalits) to unite. Similarly, the BSP's early 'Bahujan' platform aimed to forge a political alliance of Dalits, OBCs, and minorities against the so-called upper-caste establishment.

Limited Religious Iconoclasm :Though the BSP does not adopt Periyar's extreme atheism, its ideology draws heavily from the anti-caste traditions of Ambedkar and Phule. Periyar himself toured Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s to address Dalit and Backward Classes conferences, showing an early connection to the political space later occupied by the BSP.

The Case of Periyar Lalai Baudh: The connection is cemented through figures like Periyar Lalai Baudh, a pioneer of Bahujan politics in Uttar Pradesh who translated Periyar's radical works into Hindi, directly injecting Periyar's anti-caste critique into the intellectual foundation of North Indian movements.

2. Lalu Prasad Yadav and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)

Lalu Prasad Yadav's politics, rooted in the Mandal era of the 1990s, also shows a clear parallel to Periyar's struggle for the OBCs (Other Backward Classes):

The Politics of Dignity (Ijjat): Lalu Yadav's rise and subsequent governance in Bihar heavily emphasized the concept of "dignity" (Ijjat) for the backward and subaltern castes. This focus on non-Brahmin pride and self-respect is a direct echo of the foundational principle of Periyar's Self-Respect Movement.

Empowerment of the Backward Classes: Like the Dravidian Movement which empowered the non-Brahmin castes of Tamil Nadu, Lalu's rule politically emboldened the backward castes in Bihar, leading to a visible shift in social power dynamics and a refusal by lower-caste laborers to silently accept exploitation.

Mandal Politics: Periyar was the architect of the first demand for communal reservation in the Madras Presidency. The subsequent implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations (which Lalu Yadav staunchly supported) on a national level is the legislative victory of the social justice movement whose foundation was laid by leaders like Periyar in the South and Ambedkar in the West.

While Mayawati and Lalu Yadav are seen as the political successors to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the socialist tradition (Ram Manohar Lohia) in North India, the core of their political mobilization—restoring dignity, demanding proportional representation, and challenging religious/caste hierarchy—is perfectly aligned with the essence of Periyarism.
Periyar is thus a part of the pan-Indian "Bahujan-Social Justice" intellectual trinity (along with Phule and Ambedkar) that informs the ideology of all major anti-caste parties in the North.

Is there a scope for it in future?

Yes, there is a substantial scope for the principles behind Periyar's movement to influence future politics across India, particularly as social justice and cultural identity become central electoral themes.
The future scope is less about "anti-Brahmin sentiment" in a narrow, regional sense, and more about the broad application of Periyar's core ideas to current national challenges.
1. The Enduring Relevance of Social Justice (Reservation)

Affirmative Action as a National Priority: Periyar's initial fight for communal representation (reservation) has become a fundamental principle of national politics. Any future political debate over caste census, proportional representation, or expansion of reservations will inevitably draw on the historical and ideological precedent set by Periyar in the Madras Presidency.

Challenging the Elite Consensus: As non-elite castes (OBCs, Dalits) continue to assert their demographic and political weight across North India, the need to challenge the dominance of traditionally privileged groups in key institutions (judiciary, administration, media) will keep Periyar's call for proportionate power-sharing highly relevant.

2. The Rise of Cultural and Rationalist Resistance

Countering Cultural Homogenization: Periyar's emphasis on regional identity, linguistic pride, and sub-nationalism serves as a political and cultural bulwark against efforts to impose a single, homogenized national identity or language. This defense of federalism and regional diversity resonates strongly beyond Tamil Nadu.

Rationalism and Anti-Superstition: Periyar's radical rationalism and critique of superstition offer a framework for political leaders and social movements to challenge the mixing of religion and state policy. As debates about scientific temper, blind faith, and public expenditure on religious institutions continue, Periyar's relentless focus on reason as a tool for social progress remains highly potent.

3. Women's Rights and Intersectional Politics

Radical Feminist Agenda: Periyar was a champion of women's rights, advocating for divorce rights, property rights, birth control, and equal opportunity in public life decades ahead of his time. This focus on the emancipation of women from patriarchal caste structures makes his ideology valuable to modern feminist and intersectional movements across India.

Self-Respect Marriages: The concept of Self-Respect Marriages (without priests or religious rituals) provides a cultural alternative that directly challenges caste and religious control over personal life, a demand that is resurfacing in various forms across the country.

The "impact" on future leaders will likely manifest in two ways:

Direct Influence (Academics/Activists): Anti-caste and Bahujan intellectuals and activists across India increasingly study and translate the works of the "Phule-Ambedkar-Periyar" trinity, ensuring his ideas continue to inform grassroots movements.

* Indirect Influence (Political Platforms): Mainstream political parties, even if they don't explicitly name Periyar, will be forced to adopt policy planks—on caste census, quotas, women's property rights, and federalism—that are direct descendants of the battles he fought. His legacy provides a potent, proven model for social reform via political power.

What are the observations of foreign scholars on this movement and its ideologies?

Foreign scholars and international academia generally view the Dravidian Movement and its ideologies, particularly those of Periyar, as a pivotal and radical anti-caste, anti-colonial, and rationalist phenomenon that fundamentally re-engineered the political and social landscape of South India.

Their observations center on four main themes:

1. Radical Critique of Caste and Religion

Foreign scholars emphasize the depth of Periyar's ideological break with the mainstream Indian independence movement.

Anti-Brahminism as Anti-Casteism: Scholars acknowledge that the initial anti-Brahminism of the Justice Party was transformed by Periyar into a comprehensive anti-caste ideology. Periyar saw Brahminism/Hinduism as the foundational ideology that sustained social hierarchy and argued for its destruction (not reform) as a prerequisite for social change.

Rationalism and Atheism: Periyar's insistence on rationalism and his outright rejection of God, religion, and rituals is seen as a unique and powerful political tool. It liberated the movement from the constraints of reformist Hindu social thought, distinguishing it sharply from many other Indian anti-caste movements.

2. A Pioneer in Women's Radical Freedom

Periyar's views on gender are considered astonishingly radical and modern by international feminist and political theorists.

Beyond Social Reform: Unlike his contemporaries who addressed the "women's question" within the context of the family or the nation, Periyar saw the family and marriage themselves as key patriarchal institutions that limited women's freedom.

* Gendered Utopia: Scholars highlight his advocacy for birth control, property rights, divorce rights, and the abolition of the concept of "chastity" for women. He sought a "radical concept of freedom" for women, which is often compared to Western radical feminist thinkers decades later.

3. The Aryan-Dravidian Identity Construct

The movement's core narrative—the subversion of an enlightened, equitable Dravidian civilization by the hierarchical Aryan/Sanskritic culture—is acknowledged as a key political tool, influenced partly by colonial-era European philological and ethnological theories.

* Political Mobilization: This narrative was highly effective in uniting diverse non-Brahmin groups under a single, proud cultural banner (Dravidian identity), moving beyond narrow caste competition.

* Challenge to National Unity: The Dravidian ideology's assertion of sub-nationalism and the demand for a separate Dravida Nadu is viewed as a significant challenge to the homogenizing, North Indian-centric narrative of Indian nationalism and federalism.

4. The "Dravidian Model" of Governance

In recent years, foreign political economists and development scholars have focused on the practical outcomes of the Dravidian parties' rule in Tamil Nadu, terming it the "Dravidian Model."

Inclusive Development: This model is recognized for producing inclusive economic growth and superior human development indicators (education, health, poverty reduction) compared to other Indian states.

Social Populism: Scholars analyze the success of the Dravidian parties in combining welfare schemes (economic populism) with a persistent emphasis on social justice, caste-based reservations, and distributive equality (social populism).

How does the Dravidian model act as an ideal approach to welfare state?

The Dravidian Model is regarded as an ideal approach to the welfare state because it uniquely integrates social justice (equity) and economic growth by focusing on the abolition of status inequalities (caste and gender) as the fundamental engine of development. It departs from the traditional model that assumes economic growth must precede welfare spending.

The model acts as an ideal approach by following these core principles:

1. Primary Focus on Social Justice as an Economic Catalyst

The Dravidian Model in Tamil Nadu uniquely reverses the traditional economic logic. Instead of viewing welfare as a cost, it views social justice and reservation as an investment in human capital that drives inclusive economic growth.

Caste, Then Class: The core principle is that economic justice is impossible without first ensuring social justice by dismantling caste-based discrimination. The Dravidian movement, through mass mobilization, established a "Dravidian common-sense" that prioritizes equity.

Democratization of Opportunity: Policies like 69\% caste-based reservation (for SCs, STs, and OBCs) in education and government jobs broke the monopoly of a few dominant groups, allowing members of marginalized communities to access modern economic opportunities. This democratized capital accumulation and ensured that economic growth was broad-based.

2. Robust and Targeted Welfare Schemes (Social Populism)

The model is characterized by the use of state power and populist mobilization to deliver targeted welfare programs that directly address social and gender inequalities.

(Sector, Key Welfare Intervention, Impact on Welfare State Goals)

Education & Nutrition: Noon Meal Scheme (starting in 1960s), Free Breakfast Scheme, scholarships, free bicycles, and laptops massively increased school enrollment and completion rates, especially among the poor and girls, reducing dropout rates and improving nutrition.

Health: Strong network of Primary Health Centers (PHCs), Free Hospital Treatment, and targeted programs (e.g., Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam). | Led to high immunization rates, significant reduction in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), matching standards of some OECD nations.

Gender Empowerment: Free bus travel for women, financial aid for college-going girls (Pudhumai Penn Thittam), property rights. | Increased women's labour force participation and educational attainment (Tamil Nadu has one of the highest Graduate Enrolment Ratios (GER) in India), granting women greater economic independence and self-respect.

Food Security:
A universal and robust Public Distribution System (PDS) for food grains. Ensured food security for the poor, helping maintain health and nutrition levels irrespective of economic crises.

3. Simultaneous Achievement of Growth and Equity:
The Dravidian Model is often hailed for being one of the few models in the Global South to successfully achieve high rates of industrial and economic growth while simultaneously maintaining high social development indicators.
Tamil Nadu is unique in its ability to combine structural economic transformation (attracting investment, creating industrial clusters) with human development.

The democratization of access to education through reservation created a large pool of skilled, modern, educated labor, which in turn attracted industrial investment across the state, ensuring that social mobilization and economic modernization reinforced each other.

The Dravidian Model, therefore, functions as an ideal welfare state model by viewing the redressal of caste and gender-based status inequalities not just as a moral imperative, but as a pragmatic strategy for long-term, sustainable, and inclusive development.

Has the Dravidian model an appeal for other countries?

Yes, the Dravidian Model has a significant and growing international appeal, particularly among scholars of development economics, political science, and those studying the Global South.

While it hasn't been widely adopted wholesale by other countries, the model is being studied globally as a new framework for inclusive development.

1. Relevance to the Global South

The primary appeal of the Dravidian Model is its ability to offer a unique path for nations struggling with deep-seated status-based inequalities.

Challenging the Growth-First Mantra:

It directly confronts the traditional development narrative which assumes economic growth must occur first, with benefits slowly "trickling down" to address social problems. The Dravidian Model proves that mobilization against social inequality (caste and gender) and social redistribution can be the engine for sustained, broad-based economic growth.

Status-Based Inequality:

Many countries in the Global South contend with complex social hierarchies—be it ethnic, racial, or tribal—that function similarly to India's caste system in limiting access to opportunities. The model's strategy of using affirmative action and social populism to democratize access to education and the modern economy offers a

transferable lesson for countries dealing with similar entrenched structural disadvantages.

2. Scholarly Recognition

International academic literature is actively engaged in analyzing the "Dravidian Model" as a novel phenomenon:

A "New Theoretical Frontier": Scholars from institutions like Cambridge, Oxford, and Brown University have highlighted the model in their research, calling it a system that "breaks new ground" for understanding socially and economically inclusive development in the post-colonial world.

Social Populism: The model's success is attributed to its "social populism"—a political strategy that combines populist delivery of tangible welfare benefits (like mid-day meals and free services) with a clear ideological stance against status-based hierarchies.

3. Potential for Policy Export

The key policy lessons from the model that hold international relevance are:

(Policy Component, Global Applicability)

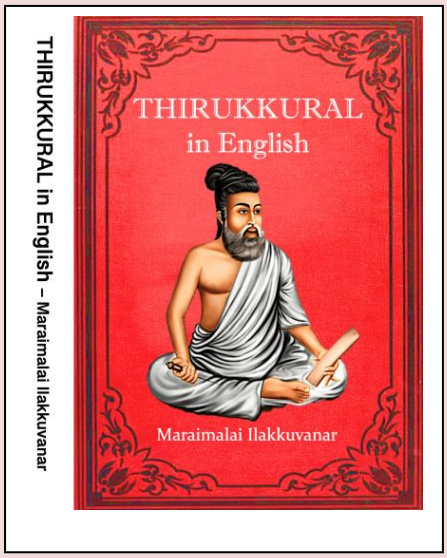
Universal PDS/Welfare: Applicable for addressing food and nutritional security in developing nations.

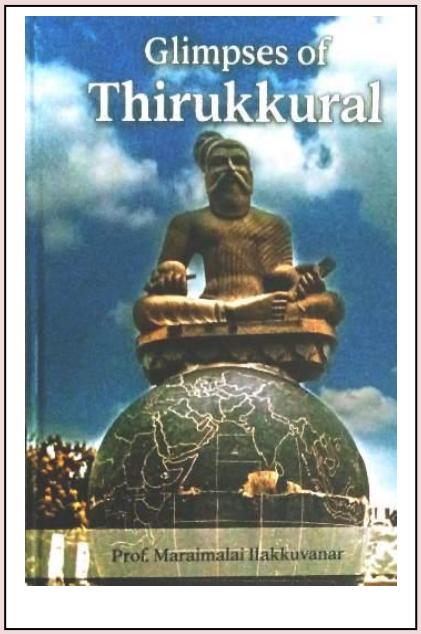
Reservations/Affirmative Action: Offers a template for countries struggling to integrate marginalized ethnic or racial groups into the modern public and private sectors.

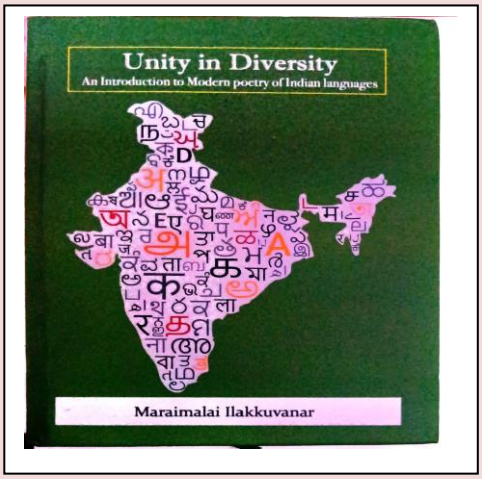
Mass Education Focus: The aggressive expansion of access to higher education for all social strata is a proven method for creating a skilled workforce, a universal need for modernizing economies.

The model's success demonstrates that investing heavily in the dignity and capabilities of marginalized populations can lead to better outcomes on food, health, education, and poverty reduction than in other similar states or nations.

''We will make a brave New World
And uproot the one on bitter wars bent;
We will spread the socialist doctrine in every direction,
And cherish it chaste as our life'' -Revolutionary poet Bharatidasan







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